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VERSES





VERSES

BY

FRANCES E. BOWEN-GRAVES

FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

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In Memory

OF

F. E. B.-G.

DIED AUG. 16, 1874

AGED 28

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[The Poems marked * were published in 'Trefoil' in 1868.]



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INTERRUPTED.

HER summer sun had hardly time to rise,
And cast fresh radiance on her dawn of youth,
To touch the woman's sweetness in her eyes,
And change the childish gladness round her mouth ;
Her long bright morning hardly had begun,
So to the toilers round her did it seem—
They to whom day looked endless, and whose sun
So seldom through the closing fog could gleam :
But He who sees with other eyes than ours,
The Master, walking in His vineyard, came ;
Passed by the idle loiterers 'mid the flowers ;
Passed by the eager ones with looks aflame,
To greet His summons. ' Ere thy morn is fled,
Rest, thou hast done enough,'

The Master said.

THE NUN ASLEEP.

CALMLY lies she there
With her jetty hair
In festoons around her forehead weaving,
And her face so white
Gleams in spectral light,
And her breast with breath is scarcely heaving.
Closed are those dark eyes,
How like death she lies,
Calm and cold, exempt from this world's grieving.

Blessèd would she be
Were her spirit free,
Flown for aye from care and sin and sorrow ;
Yes, without a sigh
Could we see her die,
See her body laid in death to-morrow.
Would not that pure soul
Haste toward the goal,
Haste angelic thoughts and wings to borrow ?

Life to her was made
One vast cloister-shade,
Not a look beyond the convent stealing :
In the other world
'Twill be all unfurled,
All the mighty depth of thought and feeling.
Oh, how glorious there
Will the light appear,
All earth's joys, without earth's sins, revealing !

The Nun Asleep.

Hush ! was that a sigh?
From the curtained eye
Was not that a tear that wandered slowly?
Does a vision come
Of that distant home,
Long remembered, though so far and lowly?
Ah, that silent tear—
Is it better here?
Were thy childhood's days less pure and holy?

Yes, and all unsought
Comes that wandering thought,
With a deep, despairing, woeful yearning
For a noble love
Most like that above,
For a path to which is no returning.
In these cloister walls,
Where no footstep falls,
Soon e'en Heaven's own light will cease from burning.

When will freedom come?
Till the heavenly home
Opens wide its gates to greet its daughter,
Oh, the long, long years !
Neither hopes nor fears
Sweep like storm or sunshine o'er the water ;
But a dead still lake,
Neither wave nor break ;—
This is what a single year has taught her.

If the blest know woe,
What bright tears must flow
O'er the head of her who lieth sleeping !
Life an aimless waste,
Every penance, placed
For a seed that shall have future reaping ;
Worship to another—
Woman, wife, and mother—
Than the God who has her life in keeping.

Lord of highest Heaven,
Be the Nun forgiven—
She who follows blindly, but believing ;
Woe be unto those
Who can blight the rose,
Undeceived themselves, although deceiving :
She has life for aye
In those realms of day,
Finding all she knew not she was leaving.

January, 1861.

FROM THE GERMAN.

‘Es klopft.’

It knocks, I come, I feel my life is flying,
And opening the dark portals of the tomb,
One inspiration, Angel of the dying,
One hymn of praise ere entering in the gloom.

Thanks to Thee, Lord, from my o'erflowing spirit,
My last, last song Thy bounteousness shall sing,
Known in each joy and sorrow men inherit,
Even now my life must with Thy praises ring.

Oh, beautiful is death, though life is dearer
And the tired body trembles in the strife,
Through deepest darkness gleams the morning clearer,
The bright free wakening to a higher life.

Farewell, sweet world, so full of joy and gladness,

Dear ones, farewell, so lovely to my heart :

Forgive me all that I have caused of sadness—

In life's last hour burns hot that bitter smart !

Many a fair flower by happiness was given,

And life was sweet while they were near, my own ;

But more I trusted in that word from Heaven,

That glorious word, ' Thy will, O Lord, be done ! '

Praise be to God ! my pain is gone for ever,

The wounded heart is struck at last to death ;

Dear ones, farewell ; for this last time we sever,

Heaven opens wide and earth flies far beneath.

FROM THE GERMAN.

‘Ich bin ein Gast auf Erden.’

A GUEST am I upon the earth,
I'm neither lord nor heir ;
In Heaven I claim my right of birth,
My Fatherland is there.
I travel here to reach my grave,
There, in the eternal Peace,
The gift of grace our Father gave
Shall bid our labours cease.

The shelter is but cold and poor,
The weariness is great :
Oh, come, my God, for evermore
Release me, for I wait :

Come, give me soon a happy end
To all my wanderings here,
And let Thy mighty arm defend
From all which now I fear.

What I till now have called my own
That is not truly mine:
And when I reach the boundary stone,
I step beyond the line.
And what till now I needed aye
I cast it from my face,
And when my breath has died away
They lay me in my place.

But Thou, my Joy, my only One,
My lifetime's guiding star,
Thou'lt take me, when my days are done,
To where Thy glories are :

The mansions of eternal light
Where I shall always stand,
'Mid sunlike troops of spirits bright
In that all-glorious land.

And there I'll dwell, in that bright Heaven,
Not only as a guest,
With those to whom the crowns are given,
With those Thou lovest best.
I'll sing of all Thy wonders there
For ages yet to come ;
And, free from care, the rightful heir
Shall find his rightful home.

‘*COSTANZA.*’

(A statue of Tenerani’s.—Rome.)

CALM, gentle, beautiful ; the delicate face
 Just curbing down the struggling touch of pain,
 The burning torture, whose o’ermastering trace
 Draws the set lips that fain would smile again
 And cannot : gazing with dilated eyes
 Beyond the earthly mystery and woe
 To where the rose hues in the distant skies
 Touch the fair features with their gathering glow :—
 So stands that figure—strong in faith and love
 In all its weakness, joyful in its woe :
 For see—the firm right hand is clenched above
 The thick clear flames, unswerving : and they glow

And scorch till each thin vein runs liquid fire.
Yet not for that it flinches, that small hand,
For evermore the vision rises higher,
The dim-seen vision of the painless land.
That for the future : now, the still endurance
Of that extremest agony : no tear
Fills the wide eyes fixed firm in calm assurance,
Perchance in love for one intensely dear,
For whom 'twas bliss to suffer all, and feel
That 'evening comes to e'en the longest day,'
That slowly, slowly, lengthening shadows steal
And bring the night, whose gloom shall pass away
In the eternal morning. So, bear on
In weakness stronger than a thousand's strength.
He that endures the longest shall have won.
And rest is pleasant when the task is done.
The task is hard : but rest will come at length.

.

Rome, 1863.

A FRAGMENT.

UNDER the flickering, changeful beech-tree shadows
I dream of cool dark olives far away ;
And 'mid the fragrance of the springing meadows
I see the wild Campagna, bare and grey.

•

Under the Gothic arches, rough and hoary,
Dim-outlined, lichen-covered, ivy-grown,
I think of pillars in their glowing glory
That stand against the deep blue sky alone.

Oh, how the memories gather, crowding dimly,
Rome, the Campagna, and the distant sea ;
St. Peter's rising giant-like and grimly
Through the blue mists that rose round Tivoli.

In gorgeous aisles a sound of slow sweet singing
And merry voices in the mid-day air,
And ruined walls with jest and laughter ringing,
And English faces, clear and proud and fair.

The sound of horses' feet on ancient highways,
And wild free gallops through Campagna dells,
And lazy riding home through narrow bye-ways
To the faint tinkle of the 'Ave' bells.

Aqueducts with the sunset on their arches,
Standing in solemn radiance on the plain,
And stretches of wild lands where verdure parches
Or rich weeds choke the half-forgotten grain.

.

AN OLD MEMORY

I REMEMBER a day, long years ago,
In the early, early spring ;—
We had ridden far, till the sun was low
And the western sky was all a-glow,
And the birds had ceased to sing.

We were riding home, and the first bright star
Shone down on us overhead ;
The distant cliffs of the eastern scaur
Reflected pure and faint and far
The tints of the sunset red.

We hastened on through the perfumed gloom
Of the over-arching trees ;
The acacia blossoms were all in bloom ;—
Little one thinks of the silent tomb
Upon evenings such as these.

We spoke not much as we rode along ;
The tramp of our horses' feet
Seemed keeping time to a slow soft song,—
Perchance it was but the sound of the throng
In the distant busy street.

And once I turned as I reached the door
And watched as he rode away,
With almond blossoms above and before
And thoughts of days that were yet in store,
As happy and bright and gay.

.

But ah, when the Christmas days were near
And the Christmas bells were ringing,
The Christmas laughter is loud and clear—
The grave is lonely and dark and drear,
And there comes not a sound of singing.

And yet, with the silence enters peace,
And the rest comes with the even ;
And round our forehead the cares increase,
And *his* will be young when time shall cease
And we meet once more in Heaven.

MY QUEEN.

WHERE and how shall I earliest meet her?

What are the words she first will say?

By what name shall I learn to greet her?

I know not now—it will come some day!

With the self-same sunlight shining upon her—

Shining down on her ringlets sheen;

She is standing somewhere—she that I honour—

She that I wait for—my Queen—my Queen!

Whether her hair be golden or raven,

Whether her eyes be hazel or blue;

I know not now, but 'twill be engraven

Some sweet day as my loveliest hue;

My Queen.

Many a girl I have loved for a minute—
Worshipped many a face I have seen :
Ever and aye, there was something in it,
Something that could not be hers—my Queen !

I will not dream of her tall and stately ;
She that I love may be fairy light ;
I will not say she must speak sedately,
Whatever she does it will then be right.
She may be humble or proud, my lady—
Or that sweet calm that is just between—
And whenever she comes she will find me ready
To do her homage—my Queen—my Queen !

But she must be courteous, she must be holy :
Pure in her spirit, this maiden I love.
Whether her birth be noble or lowly,
I care no more than the spirits above.

I will give my heart to my lady's keeping,
And ever her strength on mine shall lean ;
And the stars may fall, and the saints be weeping,
Ere I cease to love her—my Queen—my Queen !

1863.

WILL THEY?

WILL they forget us when we drop behind them?

When we have done with fair and stormy weather?

When they have nothing farther to remind them

Of all we thought and did and spoke together?

Will the day come when we are missed no longer?

When younger, happier, fairer take our place?

When memories nearer, tenderer, and stronger,

Blot out the form of our departed face?

Ay, so it must be! Thro' the future summers,

Bright eyes will shine, and sweet red roses bloom;

And cordial hands will welcome blithe new-comers

Warmly, as those so cold in yonder tomb.

Through the long winter evenings gems will glisten,
Once worn by those who wear no jewels more,
Young voices rise, while elders smile and listen,
Nor think of those who joined the song before.

New claims will rise, old bonds be slowly broken,
New friends be found who know not of the past,
New vows be made, new words of love be spoken,
Old names that none can answer, dumb at last.

Ay, so ! but yet, as sadly thus we ponder,
Come the brave words, ' Love never lived in vain.'
Some faces haunt us, be they here or yonder,
Sweet eyes, that shared our pleasure, soothed our
pain.

And those we love so dearly, though departed
May be our voice, our laughter, and our tears,
Will they not think of us, the faithful-hearted?
Will they not miss us through the coming years?

Oh ! sometimes when the busy heart has leisure,
When they are bright with hope, or vexed by care,
The thought will cross them, in their pain or pleasure,
‘Those that so loved us would have borne their
share.’

Or sometimes, when some dear face fails to greet
them,
When some jarred chord has made them feel alone,
They will remember how we used to meet them,
And yearn for hearts that were so much their own.

Yes, sometimes—let us be therewith contented—
Some friend will think of our long silent voice.
Then, in the land where no one is lamented,
They will behold us waiting, and rejoice.

A PROTEST.¹

I

MEMORIALS built to Shakspeare? Stones designed
 To keep his memory in the mouths of men,
 The burgher's son of Stratford? Fools and blind
 Who would have scorned him had ye met him then.
 Now, when the world has owned the master-mind,
 Whose eagle flight transcended human ken,
 Ye raise a statue 'neath the eternal sky
 Of that mean part of Shakspeare which could die.

II

Monuments? Statues? Did the ancients build
 Monuments to their Homer? Is there aught
 To keep their Virgil's memory unchilled?
 Give monuments to heroes who have wrought

¹ Written in the year of the Shakspeare tercentenary festival.

What Time destroys ; but for the men who filled
The universe with unforgotten thought,
The world is their memorial, wood and stone
Are little in the realm which they have made their
own.

III

Yet, if the eye needs somewhat, does the river
By that old churchyard wall no longer flow?
Do not the sunbeams through the arches quiver,
On aisles where once he knelt who sleeps below?
Do not the lime-trees bloom as fair as ever,
Broader, perchance, than when he saw them grow?
While fields are green, while Avon murmurs by,
Think ye, his memory, world-renowned, will die?

IV

Enough ! let England honour him, her son,
Now these three hundred years have past away :
It will not trouble him whose race is run,
Who lies beneath the flagstones, cold as they :

Let his name perish, and his fame be done

In this low earth where once he worked his day ;
He will not need it : be ye cold or fond,
Ye are not needed in the Great Beyond.

v

Let Shakspeare sleep, too great for praise or scorning,
In yonder quiet village chancel tomb.

The grave he guarded by the immortal warning

To those whose sacrilegious hands presume
To stir the dead before the eternal morning
Cleaves dust from dust, and lights the centuries'
gloom.

Oh ! let him sleep, by Avon's slumberous wave,
And keep a reverent silence round his grave.

AUSTRALIA.

OVER the prairies the night wind is sighing,
Great constellations are burning in heaven,
Yonder in darkness the letter is lying,
Saying, 'She died—left you loved and forgiven.'

All is past by me then—all my dream vanished ;
Bright thoughts that helped me through labour and
shame ;
Visions of welcome, where once I was banished,
Claiming you, dearest, in honour and fame.

Dark is the sky, love ; the earth dull and lonely
Now that the sun shines no more on your face.
Why struggle longer ? I lived for you only.
They with no prize needs must fail in the race.

Oh ! the long years that no hope may enlighten !

Oh ! the dull work-time—the wearier rest !

Oh ! the cold house that no presence will brighten !

April ! the violets are blue on your breast.

So you forgave me, still thinking I proved you

Just for amusement, then left you alone.

Now, where your soul is, you know how I loved you !

Now I reclaim you, for ever my own !

Shall I be bitter with those who deceived you,

Slandered my honour, and sneered at my love ?

What does it matter ? The heaven has received you.

You will know all when I meet you above.

Over the prairies the tempest is howling ;

Storm clouds are rising, and crashing on high ;

Far in the forest the wild dogs are growling ;

Savage the earth, and tempestuous the sky.

So shall my life be—dark, cheerless, and stormy ;
Yet with brief glimpses of stars thro' the night,
Heaven's deepest azure just opening before me,
Telling of realms where the darkness is light.

THE GLOVE

FROM THE GERMAN OF SCHILLER.

BEFORE the lion's grating,
The deadly fight awaiting,
 Sat Franz the king.
Round him his cavaliers,
And high in glittering tiers,
 The ladies' ring.

The King he signs aside,
And the great gate opens wide,
Forthwith a lion, thoughtfully and slow,
Enters below ;
Gazes with pride
On every side,

Yawns once and again,
And shakes his mane,
And stretches and sighs,
And down he lies.

The King signs again,
And open is flung
A second door,
And a tiger has sprung
On to the floor.
As he sees the lion's face
He growls a space, '
Swings his tail
Like a fearful flail,
And shows his tongue,
And shyly around
He circles the ground,
Grimly howling.
Then lays himself growling
On the other side.

And the King signs again,
And from open doors, to left and right,
Spring two leopards at once to sight ;
And both at once, with courage high,
Straight at the front of the tiger fly,
And he gripes them with his claws of might.
The lion arises from the ground,
Growls—and then there comes a pause.
And about and around,
With outstretched claws,
The mighty cats await the fight.

Suddenly falls from the highest stand
A lady's glove from a beautiful hand,
Right in the centre of the ring,
Between the tiger and lion-king ;
And Lady Kunigund, laughing, turns
To Count Delorges—the knighthood's flower :
' And if your love so hotly burns,

As you swear to me with every hour,
Bring my glove again to me.'

And the knight arises swift and free,
Down he climbs to the fearful ring ;
With a steady hand,
From the trampled sand,
He takes the glove in a sudden spring.

And with silent horror and admiration
Watch the lords and ladies of the nation ;
And carelessly carries he back the glove ;
And from every mouth resounds his praise.
But with a glance of flattering love,
Telling how much there is yet in store,
Lady Kunigund sits at the gallery-door ;
And he flings the glove in her very face :
' I ask you neither for thanks nor grace !'
And leaves her homage for evermore.

GOOD-BYE.

GRIEVE not for me, but remember me, brother !
Think of the weeks that we spent with each other ;
Think of the rides in the green English meadows,
Lounging with guns in the cool woodland shadows ;
Up the low hills where the red-coats were streaming,
Down the thick glades where the foxhounds were
gleaming,
Think how we galloped to take the brook flying.
Now, I am dying !

Think of the long walks together last season,
Chattering, arguing, nonsense and reason.
Secret love-confidence, told in the gloaming ;
Healts to her name, with champagne glasses foaming ;

All the wild spirits that knew not of sorrow ;
All will be yours to remember to-morrow.
I shall have done with the laughing and sighing.
Friend, I am dying !

Grieve not for me ; but when danger is nighest—
When death is in front, and your heart beats the
 highest,
Think how we laughed, how we quarrelled together ;
Think of the nights in the long dewy heather ;
Think of the trust and the friendship unspoken ;
Think of the low word that never was broken.
Grieve not ! but think of me where I am lying,
 When *you* are dying.

A FLIRTATION.

BEAUTIFUL ALICE ! with hair so golden,
Scattering light as it ripples down ;
Years ago in the days of olden,
Knights would have tilted for your renown.
What is the wonder that eyes so gleaming
Should light my life with their fitful glow ?
What is the wonder that I go dreaming
Of hands so white, and a voice so low ?

And you ? Whenever I speak you listen :
You like my homage, you talk and smile ;
Your sweet face glows and your dark eyes glisten,
And—I know I am nothing to you the while.

You like to know that I watch each motion
Of eye and of finger, at dinner and ball.
You like me to pay you a slave's devotion,
Claiming nothing, yet giving all.

Oh, sweet Alice ! Lift not the chalice
Of perilous nectar to lips that burn :
Sometimes I think in a moment's malice
How would you look if the worm should turn ?
How if my words grew sterner and stronger ;
Instead of a compliment whispered low
I bade you trifle and flirt no longer,
But give me your answer, ' Yes,' or ' no ' ?

Ah ! but you care not ! you know that I dare not :
You know so well, too, the thing to say—
' How I had grieved you—hourly deceived you—
I, that you fancied a friend till to-day.'

Friendship?—yes, that is our vocation—
We that count not our thousands a-year :
By its other name it is called flirtation.
What matter to you, if it cost us dear?

The end will come : I must bear with meekness
The icy word and the distant bow.
Of course I acquit you of all such weakness
As falling in love—you scarce know how.
No ! you will marry—you know your duty—
One who has title or wealth to give ;
And all for love of your wondrous beauty
Will ‘honour and cherish you.’ So we live.

I hate you, Alice, with each sunrising ;
I hate myself for a love so vain :
Yet, in spite, in spite of my own despising,
I would die to save you a moment’s pain.

Oh, Alice ! Alice ! could I believe you,
Could I see your heart in those changeful eyes,
My love and my homage should never leave you,
And the gates would re-open of Paradise.

It may not be ! This lady I bow to,
Is nothing, I know, but a ball-room belle,
Whom a certain cleverness all allow to,
Who dresses superbly, and dances well.
She holds me now in her silken fetter.
She chains me now with her large bright eye.
But I think—I think, there is something better
Awaiting me somewhere, by-and-by.

SONG.

OH, kindly Earth Mother !
Receive me again :
I ask from no other
Release from my pain.
The heart's wildest beating
Is hushed in thy breast,
And life in its fleeting
Shall leave me at rest.

In far lowland meadows
The summer winds pass,
And long elm-tree shadows
Lie low on the grass ;

The wood-pigeon's cooing
Is soft overhead ;
Gold clouds are pursuing
The sun that is fled.

My sun too has vanished
Ere yet it was noon,
And the darkness he banished
Has met me too soon.
My life's only blossom
Has bloomed but to die,
And the 'bird in my bosom'
Is fretting to fly.

I ask thee for slumber,
O mother of men !
Through days without number,
Through years without ken.

My soul its rest taking,
 Shall gather its strength,
To seek him at waking,
 And find him at length.

ON SECOND THOUGHTS.

WHEN the earliest dream is over,
And life is only pain ;
Then the grave beneath the clover
Seems all that can remain ;
'Twas Shelley, Keats, and Byron,
Who spoke the highest truth,
And knew what thorns environ
The diadem of youth.

But every breeze that passes
Takes fewer sighs away ;
And the grave beneath the grasses
May wait another day.

There are pleasures for the taking,
There are verses yet to make ;
And the heart so long in breaking
Forgets at last to break.

1868.

N. B.

I SIT at my window here in the North,
And I see the clouds rise one by one,
The shadow that falls ere the rain breaks forth,
And the glimmer and sheen when the storm is done.
I see the great hills rise and glow,
With the glens and corries in purple shade ;
And the rosy flush when the sun is low,
And the lines of light by the ripples made.

For now the loch is hazy and still,
And now is living in lines of light,
Till the great white moon comes over the hill,
And the cliffs sink down in the arch of night :

Till the ghosts of Morven ride on the cloud,
And the winds in the birch-trees whisper and wail;
Till the rush of the burn comes sudden and loud,
And the storm's dark banners fleet in the gale.

I sit at my window here and gaze
As the changes pass on moor and tree,
And my life seems veiled in that silent haze—
Will the brightness ever come for me?
Will it come in a fragment of rainbow dye,
When the sunshine strikes through the drifting rain?
Will it come like the blaze of the deep blue sky,
Ere the clouds that veiled it gather again?

But oh! since the storm-clouds gather and hide
The loftiest peaks from the light and glow,
Let this vain spirit be satisfied
Though the quiet mists on my life are low.

If the gleam be wanting to gladden all,
Yet we walk and work in a soberer hue ;
And some time the shadow of eve will fall,
And the low earth sink in the infinite blue.

September, 1865.

NEVER MORE.

NEVER, oh, never more !

The old, old words with their pathetic ring,
That seem to echo down the shadowy years,
To bring again our laughter and our tears,
To waft vague scents from some forgotten spring.

Never, oh, never more !

To see the myriad fountains glistening down,
To watch the sunset of a cloudless day
Gild marble pillars in their fair decay,
To hear the 'Ave' from the distant town.

Never, oh, never more !

To wander ilex-shadowed, and behold
The opal colours quivering on the plain,
The gleam of glory on the snow-white fane,
The trembling atmosphere of liquid gold.

Never, oh, never more !

To feel the enchantment o'er the senses cast
When life and joy and beauty lay before
And crowned thee monarch of earth, sea, and shore,
The first bright year of youth, without a past.

Never, oh, never more !

Louder each season grows the sad refrain ;
Sweet things and fair departed from our life,
Perfumes grown sick, weeds tall where flowers were
 rife,
Sweet eyes, sweet words, that may not come again.

Never, oh, never more !

Say lips that quiver now, and eyes that burn.—

Wait but awhile, with smiles and songs and flowers

Shall vanish wild heart-yearnings, loneliest hours,

All shall have past behind thee, to return

Never, oh, never more !

January, 1865.

I STAND upon the churchyard grass
Which yet no spade hath riven,¹
And round my footsteps as they pass
The dying leaves are driven.

Yet blue the winter sky and clear
And sweet the sunlight round me ;
It glows on mossy tombstones near
Whose silent spell has bound me.

For here, below the grass I tread
Place is appointed for me,
And silent here shall rest my head
Through sunny days and stormy.

¹ An addition was made to Mickleton churchyard in the year in which this poem was written.

A quiet life will come and go
In yonder quiet village,
And yonder sun shine high and low
On harvest time and tillage.

The world will grow, as aye it grew,
With every season stronger,
And all the change—the place I knew
Will know me then no longer.

The heart that now beats high with life
Will then have ceased its beating,
The sharp refrain of joy and pain
No longer low repeating.

O Thou, who made this sky and air,
Who made the hearts that love me,
Whose earth will still be fresh and fair
When cold 'tis heaped above me,—

Let earth once more to earth depart,
Let dust the dust inherit,
So Thou, to know Thee where Thou art,
Receive the immortal spirit.

1865.

SHE stood in the light of the summer even,
It flushed her cheek with its gathering glow ;
And I thought, ' Can angels in yonder heaven
Have holier faces than those below ?
Do their eyes grow bright with the flash immortal ?
Do they fold their hands in unconscious prayer ?
And are those that are waiting without the portal
Less pure than the blessed already there ? '

I saw her again, when youth departed
Had taken the light from her loving eyes—
A woman saddened and weary-hearted,
With heavy burdens and angry skies.

Yet thro' furrowed brows and unlovely features
Looked out a spirit unearthly fair,
And I knew that tried and conquering creatures
Are higher in heaven than the angels there.

A LEGEND OF 1715.

SIR EWEN rose in the dead of night,
And he bade ‘Light high the fire ;
Let the steer be killed, and the quaighs be filled :
Fling open hall and byre.

‘Bring the spoil of the quiver, and fish from the river:
Up, hasten ye, maid and man,
And call to the feast from the north and the east
The might of the Cameron clan.

‘I have dreamt a dream, a dream of power,
That bade me rise and do,
For the Stuart once more is on Scottish shore,
And the Camerons aye were true.’

But his henchman stood in doubt and fear,
And his lady clasped his hand ;
For Sir Ewen's glance was like one in trance,
And they might not understand.

' Do ye deem because I am weak with age
Ye may mock at my locks of grey ?
Lochiel hath said, " Let the feast be spread : "
And who dares disobey ? '

The brow of the chief was dark with ire ;
They feared to answer more :
The castle was raised, and the bonfire blazed
On the Arkaig's dusky shore.

And the grey rock rang to the scabbard's clang,
And echoed the pibroch's din,
As with targe and brand, at their lord's command,
The Camerons crowded in.

The shouts rose high to the noontide sky,
As they feasted each in place,
And the chief stood up, with a brimming cup,
And drank to the Ancient Race.

But from man to man a murmur ran,
‘For what are we here to-day?
We have come from far over moor and scaur,
To neither foray nor fray.’

But each man hushed, and his neighbour crushed,
For a stranger stood in the hall:
‘A greeting I bring from your exiled king,’
He cried to the Camerons all.

Like deer amazed, the clansmen gazed,
Then a word began to steal:
‘Such inward power is the mighty dower
Of the lineage of Lochiel!’

‘ Now welcome hither ! ’ Sir Ewen cried,
‘ Thy news is none to me ;
Thou comest to say, “ Arm all for fray :
The Prince has crossed the sea.”

‘ My battles are done, but take my son
To fight to his latest breath ;
My clan is ready : their hands are steady,
To serve their lord till death.’

Sir Ewen’s eye was dim once more,
Sir Ewen’s voice was low :

‘ I have lived my life, I have done with strife,
So let Prince Jamie know.

‘ But my clan’s best pride, on my mountains wide,
Shall be the ravens’ food,
So a Stuart may reign, and be lord again,
In the halls of Holyrood.

‘ Enough, feast on, for the day is done :

To-morrow, go forth,’ he said.

When the clan arose in the morning sun

They found their chieftain dead.

*AN INDIAN LEGEND.*¹

SNOW on the fir-tree,
Snow on the plain :
The boughs that are shrouded
May blossom again ;
But joy the departed,
Leaves nothing but pain.

He heeded not November damp,
Nor winter blasts that freeze ;
He sat alone without the camp,
Where underneath the trees

¹ See *New America*, vol. i.

A slender mound of prairie earth
Yet fresh and grassless lay ;
He watched it in the morning's birth,
And when the night was grey.

When shone October's broadest moon,
When maple leaves were red,
Long wooed, a bride, in wedding pride,
To Uncas' lodge they led.
The rites were done, the feast begun—
'Thou'rt pale !' the bridegroom cried :
A shriek—a fall ! the women run :
They lift a lifeless bride.

Of that wild tribe the best of all,
The most beloved, must die ;
Her lord's entreaties cannot call
The knowledge to her eye.

They buried her in bridal gear ;
They wept, and turned away.
From him came neither word nor tear ;
He watches night and day.

December's moon shone cold and white
On dazzling lines of snow ;
The hunter thought of the Isle of Light,
Where happy spirits go.
'To follow behind her,—seek her and find her
Far in the western sea !
The forests are strong, the way is long,
But not too long for me.'

He journeyed on through winter frost,
He sped through springtide rain,
Till summer flowers his pathway crost,
And berries bloomed again.

At last, beside an ancient lodge,
An ancient man he saw,
His hair so white, his eye so bright,
He gazed with fear and awe.

‘She whom you seek,’ the elder cried,
‘Was resting here anon:
Lay down your signs of earthly pride,
And follow where she is gone.
Leave here your dog, leave here your bow,
Leave here your wampum-band:
Nor lance nor quiver may pass the river
That circles the spirit-land.’

The chief obeyed, his weapons laid,
Suddenly light he sprang;
The air was soft, the birds aloft
In notes unearthly sang.

Before him lay a stormy bay,
Beyond an island strand,
To bear him through, a white canoe
Lay shining on the sand.

His prow cut lightly through the tide,
Another bark was there ;
She shot to his side, his dark-haired bride,
Unearthly pale, and fair.
And swift and swift the currents drift,
Yet safe to land they float,
And round them see a company
Of many a struggling boat.

There were children there with innocent air ;
Their barks went lightly in :
But bitter the strife to those whose life
Was selfishness and sin.

The storm was not on sea or shoal,
The storm was not in air,
The storm was only in the soul
Of those who ventured there.

And now the happy land was gained,
The lost companion won ;
There bitter snowblast never pained,
There never set the sun.
And fain, oh fain, would Uncas stay,
But, lo ! a whisper fell,
The Great All-Father spoke : ‘ Away, .
Thine is not here to dwell !

Depart, and go to the land of snow ;
Thou hast a hope before :
When life is over, return, O lover,
And seek the island shore.’

He started : morning stars were dim,
Chill gleamed the plains and white ;
It had only been a dream to him,
The Island of Delight.

Snow on the fir-tree,
Snow on the plain ;
The boughs that are shrouded
Will blossom again ;
And hope the remotest
Brings comfort to pain.

SONNET.

THOU, in whose presence I forget to smile,
Counting the moments that too quickly flee ;
Couldst thou but blind my dazzled eyes awhile,
To that dark Future where thou wilt not be !
Beautiful art thou, as a landscape seen
In sudden sunlight on a dreary day ;
Resplendent as the moontrack on the sheen
Of stormy waters, when the night is grey ;
Sweet as the wild note of the nightingale
In utter stillness : oh, too sweet, too bright !
Duller the wintry sky for gleams that fail ;
Darker the midnight ocean for the light ;
Heavier the silence since that elfin tone.
What shall the life be called, whence thou art gone ?

October 1866.

ROME'S LAST PAGEANT.

OPEN thy gates, O Rome ! to those that come—

Open thy gates and let the vanquished in :

Thus, with no measured sound of fife and drum ;

Thus, with no ransomed people's joyous din,

Silently meet thy conquered children, Rome !

This is their welcome to their ancient home.

From Porta Pia, down the paven road,

Go forth the crowds to meet the dreary train.

Heavily drag the waggons with their load

From the bright hills across the dusty plain—

Those hills from which they watched St. Peter's dome,

And dreamt that they were waited for in Rome.

And Rome waits for them ; by the long dead walls
Where hides Torlonia's villa with its state,
From where bright water in the Piazza falls,
To the low cypress by St. Agnes' gate,
Romans by tens of thousands watch to-day,
And crowd the stones of the Nomentan way.

Poor was the victory, little is the show.

Lo ! Rome's deliverers ! wounded beggar-boys !
When Romans richer, older, wiser grow,
They think of winter trading and the joys
Of piled polenta : let the Pope remain,
And let his subjects make their righteous gain.

Yet there is something stirring in their heart

For those who fought 'to conquer or to die.'
No cheers : French bayonets are not far apart.

Yet, as the moaning freights go slowly by,
Each head uncovers : so they enter Rome,
Their prize erewhile, their prison now, their home.

Dishonoured city ! glory of the Past,

Shame of the Present—is there left to thee
A Future? Will thy chains be ever cast,

Thy priests God's servants, and thy people free?
And will thy children ever learn to fear
That King alone whose kingdom is not here?

Hopeless our hope. Thy lowest fall is now,
Shrine of long memories. Happy are thy dead—
Blessèd the wounded captives lying low.

But thou art fallen. Thy earthly light is fled
'Ilicet.' All that made thee great is gone.
Our only reverence is for earth and stone.

If thou art desert in the future times—

If daisies in the Doria's palace grow—
If ivy round thy Raphael's Loggie climbs,
Thou wilt be better, nobler then, than now.
A marble-cumbered plain, a ruined dome—
That is the only Freedom left for Rome.

November, 1867.

A LIKENESS.

A BROW as fair—an eye as bright,
The dark hair's beauty, fold on fold ;
A neck as rounded, pure and white,
The lips and chin of perfect mould :—
Sunlit against the darkened wall
Thy face shone on me — yet not thine :
The glory of thy spirit,—all
That made thy presence half divine
Not there, not there : not ever more
While flowers return, while waters flow,
Wilt thou reenter through the door,
Nor will thy laughter come and go.
But she that wears thy beauty's crown,
Yet is no queen to reign thereby,

May love and weary, smile and frown,
Enjoy the swift hours as they fly :
While thou that once didst make the place
Thou stoodst in lovely, shalt lie still ;
Thy form departed, and thy face
Remembered not in good and ill.
Alas ! the everlasting cry,
The groans of the creation rise :
The burning never answered ' Why '
Echoes to changeless stars, and dies.

Yet eyes that live and look on care
Grow dull in pleasure, blank through pain :—
Hers will, thy likeness : and the fair
Sweet face will ne'er be smooth again
As thine was ; so, I sometimes dream,
Where'er thou hast thy being now
Thou wouldst have lost the unearthly gleam
That shines on thine untroubled brow,

Had years of earthly joy detained thee
And dulled thy spirit's freshness too,
But now—the bright world which hath gained thee
Will keep thy beauty pure and new,
God's image, nothing less : the soul
Half hidden here, though fair the screen,
Shall meet me when I reach life's goal,
And life's long grief—what might have been—
Be quenched in one immortal sense
Of love grown perfect, partings done :—
The dream is something : long years hence
Comes the fulfilment : then the sun
That shines on her, and not on thee,
That makes this empty earth so bright,
Shall grieve me not ; for I shall see
Thy face, where darkness shall be Light.

SUPPOSE.

SUPPOSE I wrote to you
On this paper by my hand,
Suppose I told you true,
You, would you understand?
You, would you read it through?

Suppose I called you by
The name I know so well,
The name I never may try,
That all my heart would tell,—
You, would you frown or sigh?

Suppose I went away
From earthly veils and seeming,
Suppose you heard them say
‘The dreamer has done his dreaming.’—
Would it sadden you half a day?

Suppose you loved me?—No,
A truce to such supposing :
The feast within a-glow,
Just as the door is closing,—
Into the night I go.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

‘God rest you merry gentlefolks,
Let nothing you dismay,
For Jesus Christ our Saviour
Was born upon this day.’

‘God rest you,’ friends, when toil seems endless,
When weary eyelids cannot close,
When haggard stands the soul and friendless,
Tired out by ne’er relaxing foes :
God rest you, none but He can give
The rest by which His children live.

‘Nothing dismay you,’—not the seasons
That lie before us, dark, unknown,

Not the blind human heart that reasons
‘God should give gladness to His own,’
Not aspirations unfulfilled,
Not deepest longings dying chilled.

‘God rest you, nothing you dismay :’
He came to-day to give us peace.
Hark what the midnight church bells say,
Think how the backward years increase.
With childhood’s troubles He began,
And knew all sufferings of the man.

‘God rest you, give you merriment,’
God doth give gladness to His own,
Not gladness needing earth’s content,
But chords from Heaven’s own selfless tone.
God rest you, nothing you dismay,
Since Jesus Christ was born to-day.

A LEGEND OF APPIN.

I

SPOKE Columba, as he stood
By Iona's carven rood,
'Brethren, not for us to raise
Idle hymns of empty praise!
Take the message ye have learned,
Take the blessing ye have earned,
Take the cross and raise it high
Where the clans in darkness lie.'

II

Swift the brethren to obey,
North and south they steer their way,
North to Coolin's tempests dire,
South by dark and wild Cantire ;

Eastward brave St. Oran bore,
Past the slopes of green Lismore
'Mid the crags of Appin stood,
Spoke the word and raised the rood.

III

Unbelieving and amazed
Long the sons of Fiorn gazed,
Could not, reared in savage pride,
Comprehend the Crucified.
Cried at last the chieftain loud,
From the clansmen's shaggy crowd,
' If your message be divine,
Give us, priest, a certain sign.

IV

' Else, when we have sought the hosts
Of our fathers' mighty ghosts,
Fiorn and Diarmid wroth will say
" Whence the tale you bring to-day?

Long o'er Morven's hills we strode,
Long in Creran's glen abode :
Nought we heard of gods that die."—
Priest, what shall their sons reply ?'

V

Flushed St. Oran's furrowed face,
High he held the sign of grace,
'Chieftain, bid your clansmen mark
Hill and glen from dawn till dark.
If each stone by cairn or haven
Do not bear the cross engraven,
Heathen as ye were, remain,
Heathen seek your sires again !'

VI

Every eye on rock is bent,
Every glance on search intent :—
Lo ! where pebbles crowd the shore
Every stone the emblem bore :

Where the torrent's course has riven
Rock from rock in thunder driven,
Youths and elders gaze in fear,—
Crosses from 'mid earth appear !

VII

Whether Oran's eyesight keen
Marked what heretofore had been,
Whether Heaven's especial grace
Sent the wonder to the place,—
Ask I not : the clansmen saw,
Knelt in wonder, heard with awe :—
Appin's chief the sign received,—
Albyn's wildest tribe believed.

VIII

Still by every rock-hewn fall
Crossing veins the tale recall ;
Still on Appin's rugged coast
Every wayside stone is crossed.—

Signs and wonders have departed :
Lives the work of men true-hearted.
And each cultured strath and glen
Tells us of Columba's men.

1871.



'A FAITHLESS AND PERVERSE GENERATION.'

WE ask for a new inspiration,
We look unto heaven for a sign ;
We have gazed at the old revelation
Till we find it no longer divine.

As the grown man may puzzle and ponder
O'er the tale which for childhood sufficed,
We seek 'mid the churches in wonder
An heir to the Commune of Christ.

The spirit for ever denying
Has seized on our hopes, on our dreams ;
The one thing undoubted is dying :—
Is death but the sleep that it seems ?

Have Learning and Labour and Culture
 Made only immortal our pains?
 We have striven :—is the beak of the vulture
 The only reward that remains?

'Mid the sorrows of man and of woman,
 With new nerves and new sympathies torn,
 We yearn for the Godhead made human,
 We cling to the Bethlehem born.

But through many a dead generation
 Gleams feebly the message divine,
 And we ask for a new revelation,
 We look unto heaven for a sign.

FROM H. HEINE.

‘ Sie haben mich gequälet.’

THEY have been my torture daily,
 My torment early and late,—
 The ones with the love they bore me,
 And the others with the hate.

In my glass they have poured their poison,
 They have poisoned the bread I ate,—
 The ones with the love they bore me,
 And the others with the hate.

But she who most and longest
 Has goad and torturer proved,—
 Me she has never hated,
 And me she has never loved !

December, 1872.

A HERETIC HYMN.

THOU, whose name has gleamed so long
In the vanguard of the strong,
Thou, who in Thy life didst seek
Poor and bad, diseased and weak,
Art Thou living? Dost Thou know
How the tales about Thee go?

Can Thy calm eyes see the crowd,
Weary, languid, fair and proud,
Gathered in the houses raised
That the carpenter be praised,
Saying as thy brethren pass,
‘ Lord, we are not of their class ? ’

Can Thy patient ears receive
Prayers from those who fain believe,
Kneeling by luxurious beds,
Bending diamond-shining heads,—
That the vagrant houseless Jew
Hears and blesses as they sue?

Christ ! if Thou canst hear and see,
Lo, disciples cry to Thee !
Save us from this tinsel sign,
From this cross which is not Thine :
Save us from the lies that breed
Where Thy foemen preach Thy creed.

Liv'st Thou, hear'st Thou yet, our Lord,
So long worshipped and implored
Nay, if Thou art resting still
Dreamless on that Syrian hill,
Yet the strong delight in Thee
Hath its power to save and free.

From the basest joy of self,
From the subtler love of self,
From the bread we would not share,
From the death we would not dare,
From the life we could not brave,
Dead Redeemer ! Thou canst save !

1874.

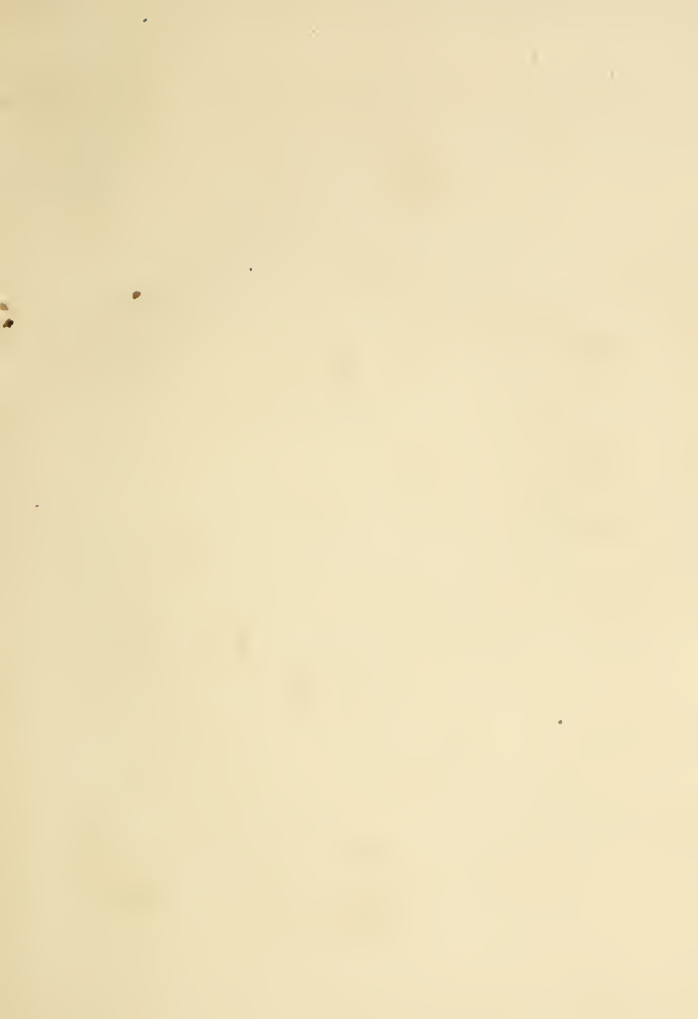
SAID bright eyes to weary eyes,
‘What see you there so far?’
‘I see a country all my own
Where sweet old summers are.’

Said red mouth to pale mouth,
‘What makes your smile so sweet?’
‘I murmur words familiar once
When I had one to greet.’

Said blithe feet to tired feet,
‘What makes your pace the best?’
‘Rough ways and smooth are left behind,
And close in front is rest.’

March 1874.

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